

# Chuck Gross

## End-Of-Session Report

Dear Friends:

The General Assembly adjourned its regular session on May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2003, having passed a record 254 bills. I had the distinct honor of passing the first bill of the regular session, rejecting the pay increase for legislators and judges as recommended by a citizen's commission. In this time of budget constraints, such an increase would be unconscionable.

Despite being called back for a special session to address budget bills vetoed by the Governor,

as vice-chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, I can attest to the seriousness with which legislators took their obligation to allocate taxpayers' dollars wisely. Priorities were established and necessary reductions made, limiting impacts on direct services to the best of our ability. Given the facts, I believe most would agree that the General Assembly passed a fair budget.

I would ask that you continue to keep me informed of government issues of interest to you and your family.

*"...I can attest to the seriousness with which legislators took their obligation to allocate taxpayers' dollars wisely."*

*Chuck Gross*

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# 2003

# State Budget -

Area legislators played significant roles in the budget process with Sen. Gross serving as vice-chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee and Rep. Carl Bearden heading the House Budget Committee. At issue this session was finding consensus on how to best contend with less revenue in a slow economy, addressing the expansive growth of state government, and enacting reforms to correct inadequacies in the budgeting process.

The General Assembly provided \$19 billion to fund state services for fiscal year 2004, picking up more than \$500 million in new revenue and statutory savings, which included the closure of various tax “loopholes.”

Additional federal aid allowed legislators to increase education funding and to restore a portion of earlier cuts in mental health and social services.

Legislators funded basic state aid to public schools at one-half of one percent less than the total they received last year. Amounts to each district are calculated under the State’s foundation formula.

Increases in Medicaid and Second Injury Fund benefits for re-injured workers were covered. More dollars were approved for crime victim compensation and for new technology supports. The budget also anticipated increased tax refunds to taxpayers.

Personnel, expense and equipment budgets for most state agencies were reduced. Various programs were scaled back and in some cases eliminated.

Sen. Gross passed the Missouri Sunset Act, designed to streamline state government and require re-authorizations of new programs for them to continue. He also passed a measure to assess the efficient use of judicial resources.

Sen. Gross co-sponsored performance-based budgeting to begin periodic reviews of state agencies to verify delivery of effective and cost-efficient services. He also passed a state employee retirement incentive with strict limits against re-filling non-essential positions, estimated to save the state as much as \$15.1 million in Fiscal Year 2004.

## DISTRIBUTION OF EACH TAX DOLLAR FY 2004 MISSOURI STATE OPERATING APPROPRIATIONS\* All Funds: \$19.094 Billion



\* All operating appropriation bills signed by the Governor, including bills in both special sessions

\*\* Revenue, Office of Administration, Elected Officials, General Assembly

\*\*\* Includes Fringe Benefits (Retirement, Insurance, Deferred Compensation) & Leasing

# Important Issues for Missouri

## Nursing Care Reforms

Sen. Gross co-sponsored Senate Bill 566 providing greater accountability in the care of seniors in nursing homes as well as for care provided by agencies in private residences. Included were increased punishments for abuse or neglect, required investigations, and evaluations for in-home care.

Protections were given to workers reporting abuse, and broader background checks are required of nursing home job applicants new to Missouri.

Additional provisions direct money from fines to be used for elderly home meal services and for state programs to improve nursing home care.

Surveys of home health agencies and long-term care facilities are accessible online at [www.dhss.state.mo.us/showmelongtermcare](http://www.dhss.state.mo.us/showmelongtermcare). Sen. Gross voted *yes*.

## Missouri's Senior Rx Plan

The General Assembly fully funded Missouri's Senior Rx Program to help older citizens with prescription costs. Changes were also made to the program to assure access to both name-brand and generic drugs. Senator Gross voted *yes*.

## Military Veterans

The General Assembly secured more funding for Missouri's veterans' homes and for the Missouri National Guard Trust Fund.

The application deadline for the WW II medallion program was extended to January 1, 2005, and now allows the eldest living survivor of a deceased veteran to apply. Call toll-free at 866-834-3431.

A Korean Conflict Medallion Program was established for veterans serving between June 27, 1950, and January 31, 1955. Those who were honorably discharged and reside in Missouri can receive a medallion, medal and certificate. If deceased, the spouse or eldest living child of the veteran can apply. Applications should be available in 2004.

The honorary high school diploma program was expanded to apply to all veterans who left high school to enter the military. For additional information call toll-free at 866-838-4636. Sen. Gross voted *yes*.

## Vetoes

Bills passed by the General Assembly and vetoed by the governor may be taken up for possible legislative override during the veto session in September.

## Transportation

Sen. Gross passed a measure to save as much as \$15 million a year of our state highway funds by exempting from sales tax the construction materials used on state road projects beginning July 1, 2005. Sen. Gross voted *yes*.

Sen. Jon Dolan passed an accountability bill providing for an independent inspector general, and measures to de-politicize the transportation commission. Sen. Gross voted *yes*.

## Business

Employment security was improved to ensure benefits are provided for valid claims, and to keep the fund solvent.

Small business concerns were made a part of the administrative rule process, and legal reforms were passed setting reasonable limits for non-economic damages and requiring lawsuits be tried where an incident occurs or the party resides. Sen. Gross voted *yes*.

## Economic Development

Rep. Tom Dempsey's Missouri Downtown and Rural Economic Stimulus Act provides a strong, economic development tool for revitalizing declining downtown areas, affording a high level of accountability and requiring up-front results before receiving support.

Modifications to programs targeting large industry, enterprise zones, and job training were passed to aid efforts to retain the Hazelwood Ford plant. Sen. Gross voted *yes*.



***Sen. Gross acknowledges and thanks veterans for their dedication and sacrifices during times of war.***

# Important Issues for Missouri - Continued

## Education

Constraints on schools and teachers were eased in the areas of finance and maintaining teacher certifications, and by removing restrictions to starting the school year prior to September 1.

Also, a three-day sales tax holiday will be set for August 2004 to allow for the state sales-tax free purchase of back-to-school clothing and supplies. Sen. Gross voted *yes*.

## Health

Women choosing abortion must give informed consent after consultation with their doctor 24-hours prior to the procedure. Senator Gross voted *yes*.

Certain health insurers are required to provide coverage for chiropractic care. Rep. Sherman Parker passed a pilot program to better inform patients of elective surgery procedures. Sen. Gross voted *yes*.

## AMBER Alert

Senator Gross passed a statewide AMBER Alert program to allow the quick spread of bulletins anywhere in the state in the event of an abduction. State highway department message boards in the St. Louis area would be utilized.

## Child Protective Services

Foster care reforms were passed placing higher accountability standards on the Division of Family Services and requiring a preponderance of evidence before removing children from their homes. Included were Sen. Gross' prohibition of strip searches of students without parental permission, the creation of a state child advocate office, and Rep. Cynthia Davis's provision requiring juvenile officers to send truancy reports to schools. Sen. Gross voted *yes*.

Rep. Joe Smith also passed a measure to give the Attorney General authority to seek removal of child pornography from Internet web sites. Sen. Gross voted *yes*.

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## Other Bills Passed

### HB 228 - SPAM e-mail

Requires unsolicited commercial e-mails to be labeled with "ADV" and sender's identity; increases enforcement capabilities and civil penalties. Sen. Gross voted *yes*.

### HB 470 - Ephedrine Sales

Restricts sale of ephedrine products used in the making of the illegal drug "meth" to behind-the-counter or within short reach and in view of a checker. Contains the provision to allow more restrictive measures passed by municipalities before Dec. 23, 2002, to prevail locally. Sen. Gross voted *yes*.

### HB 349 - Conceal Carry

Allows carrying of concealed weapons by law-abiding citizens meeting age, residency, background, and firearm safety training requirements. Permits would not allow carrying concealed weapons into certain places such as schools, churches and public buildings. Sen. Gross voted *yes*.

### HB 208 - Utilities

Includes Rep. Kevin Threlkeld's provision protecting fair competition in the heating, venting and air-conditioning (HVAC) industry by requiring utilities to comply with the same requirements as private contractors, upgrades technical ability of the PSC, and provides utility cost savings for schools.

### SB 1 - Boating Safety

Beginning January 1, 2005, persons younger than 21 must have a safety ID card from the State Water Patrol in order to operate boats on Missouri lakes. Sen. Gross voted *no*.

### HB 598 - Vehicle Licenses

Adds an organ donor license plate co-sponsored by Sen. Gross and includes Rep. Scott Rupp's provision for a 2-year disabled placard, and Rep. Tom Green's changes to custom vehicle registration. Sen. Gross voted *yes*.

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## **Proposals Not Passed**

### **Seniors Property Tax Relief**

Conflicting measures passed in the House and the Senate. Time ran out before an acceptable compromise could be found. Considerable progress was made garnering support from the education community and local government associations to work seriously with Sen. Gross on resolving differences. *Sen. Gross sponsored one of the Senate proposals.*

Eligible seniors and totally disabled homeowners and renters can continue to apply for the existing Property Tax Credit program, providing reimbursement of up to \$750 for rent or property taxes paid in a calendar year. More information and tax credit forms can be accessed online at [www.dor.state.mo.us/tax/personal/#circuit](http://www.dor.state.mo.us/tax/personal/#circuit) or by calling toll-free at 800-877-6881.

### **Broadband**

Efforts at the state level to prohibit restrictions on high-speed Internet service stalled when the House bill failed to get through the Senate committee process. *Sen. Gross co-sponsored the Senate's version.*

## **Constituents Voiced Their Opinions**

The results of the survey mailed to registered voters earlier in the year are summarized as follows, indicating the responses receiving the highest vote totals. I thank everyone who took time to thoughtfully respond.

**Prioritizing state government services** (beginning with the highest priority and ending with the lowest)

1. Elementary & Secondary Education
2. Health
3. Economic Development
4. Public Safety
5. Transportation
6. Social Services
7. Mental Health
8. Environmental Protection
9. Higher Education
10. Corrections
11. Other (various topics)

### **Utility Regulation and Cost Recovery**

Most voters preferred that regularly scheduled rate reviews replace expensive, repetitive rate cases for typical cost of energy increases, with savings benefitting consumers.

### **Tort Reform**

Voters overwhelmingly supported setting reasonable limits on non-economic damage awards in lawsuits, the time allowed for filing suit, and where lawsuits can be filed.

### **State General Revenue**

Voters preferred the state reduce the number of special fund accounts, consolidating its general revenues to strengthen cash flow, and allow for greater budget flexibility and control by the legislature.

### **Medicaid**

Voters responded that Missouri needs to run its Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIPs) as an insurance program of last resort for low-income families with hard or costly to insure children. CHIPs should not be an expanded welfare program.

## End-Of-Session Report - Senator Chuck Gross - Insert



*Senator Gross took time to visit with the Vision St. Charles Leadership Group during their tour of the capitol in February, 2003.*

### **Area Appointments to State Boards and Commissions:**

- **Donna Powell**, Citizens Advisory Commission for Marketing Agricultural Products.
- **Dale Finke**, St. Charles Convention & Sports Facilities Authority (re-appointment).
- **Kathleen Bargeon**, Child Neglect and Review Board (re-appointment).

*For information on the appointment process, visit web site:*

**<http://go.mo.gov/boards.htm>**



*The Duchesne High School Lady Pioneers Basketball Team State Champs posed with Sen. Gross during a recent Capitol visit.*

### **CONTACT SENATOR GROSS:**

My staff and I are here to answer any questions or concerns you may have about Missouri Legislature. Feel free to contact my office any time for more information about our State Government.

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*Sen. Gross poses with Boys and Girls Club of St. Charles County 2003 Youth of the Year Jack Sago. Bryan Haverstick, program manager, is pictured at right.*